



steepertTM

ed brubaker
sean phillips

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APR

SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS

WILDSTORM.COM

Sean
2002

BANGKOK,
FOUR YEARS
AGO...

So here I am, sitting
in some anonymous bar
in Thailand, waiting
for something to
happen...

That's how the last
part of my life
ended and the new
part began...

Two months of bouncing
around the Middle East,
Hong Kong, Tangiers,
and now here.

This was Lynch's
big plan.

Avoid the law, let myself
be seen, and above all...
Act like I'm waiting for
a better offer to come
along.

Hell, at this point,
I pretty much am.

All this
drinking,
and I can
hardly
feel it...

I'm still getting used to
what my condition has
done to my nervous system.
Realizing how much of the
world and its effects are
filtered through it.

But my filter is clogged,
maybe forever... Now it's
like a wall between me
and the rest of the world.

And what worries me is, I'm not sure if I really mind the extra layer of separation...

CAN I BUY YOU ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE, MR. CARVER?

...OR ARE YOU DRINKING ALONE AGAIN TONIGHT?

I'M JUST DRINKING... NO PREFERENCE EITHER WAY.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WATCHING ME?

YOU TELL ME...

THE LAST THREE DAYS, PICKED ME UP ON THE BUS IN THE MORNING.

BEFORE THAT, THERE WAS A GUY AND A GIRL. THEY WERE ON ME FROM THE AIRPORT.

< NO CHARGE FOR THIS TABLE, GIRL, AND BE IN ROOM 8 BY MIDNIGHT. >

< I - I WISH ONLY TO PLEASE YOU... >

WELL, IT APPEARS YOU'RE EVERYTHING WE HEARD YOU WERE, MR. CARVER.

MY NAME IS STEELEYE, AND I'M HERE TO OFFER YOU AN OPPORTUNITY.

WHAT'D YOU JUST DO?



WHAT, HER?

GAVE HER A LITTLE *PUSH*, THAT'S ALL.



YOU PLAN ON TRYING THAT WITH ME, TOO?



AH, NO... WHILE MY DOOR *DOES* SWING ANY WHICH WAY, YOU'RE NOT *EXACTLY* MY TYPE...

AND TO BE PERFECTLY FRANK, I CAN'T GET A READING ON YOU AT ALL.



THAT'S WHY IT TOOK ME SO LONG TO APPROACH YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE.

YEAH, THAT MAKES SENSE.



BECAUSE OF YOUR *POWERS*?



I PREFER TO THINK OF IT AS MY *DISEASE*.



NOW, WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU WANT?



And that was how I met Steeleye, Tao's main recruiter.

A Full-time bastard if ever there was one, watching him use his abilities made you want to scrub your eyes with a wire brush afterwards...



*So it was no huge surprise
how he ended up...*

*It was only the situation
surrounding his death,
and the repercussions of
it that came as any
shock at all.*

THE INQUIRY

WRITER: ED BRUBAKER
ARTIST: SEAN PHILLIPS
COLORS: TONY AVIÑA
WITH RANDY MAYOR FOR WS FX
LETTERS: BILL OAKLEY
ASST. EDITOR: KRISTY QUINN
EDITOR: SCOTT DUNBIER

SLEEPER CREATED BY BRUBAKER & PHILLIPS

NEW YORK, LAST WEEKEND...

THIRD STREET ARMS

While the good guys have their secret headquarters in space and on the moon, those of us on the other side of the fence have an assortment of hangouts...

... and an assortment of hanger-ons.

Wannabes and groupies. Kids who wish they were bad, and young girls who just need to be close to bad for a few hours at a time.

In the old days, major villains like Doctor Mind, Hugo Lark, the Undertaker... They wouldn't have been caught dead around here. Those guys had class...

... But the super-powered badasses of our modern era spend a considerable part of their lives in underground dumps like this...

... Because who the Fuck doesn't want to be treated like a rock star?

It's the curse of the 21st century.

It was in the Tird
Street Arms
that Steeleye
left his final
smear on the
world...



NO. THEY'D
EAT HIM
ALIVE.

LET
HIM GO,
MAN...

THANKS... THANKS A
LOT, GENOCIDE...

YOU'RE A REAL
ASSHOLE SOMETIMES,
YOU KNOW THAT?

FUCK IT,
HOLDEN...
WHAT'RE THEY
GONNA DO TO
ME?

WHAT THE
HELL IS
GOING ON
HERE?!

JESUS FUCKING
CHRIST IN HELL...
THAT'S
STEELEYE...

TAO'S
GOING TO
SHIT A
BRICK.

Of course, that's not a very accurate description. Tao doesn't shit bricks. He doesn't even get mad.

He just deals with problems in a meticulous and methodical way.



It's the lack of emotion involved that makes it scary.

LET ME START BY SAYING HOW **OBJECTIONABLE** IT IS TO BE HERE UNDER SUCH **CIRCUMSTANCES...**



... STEELEYE WAS A **VALUED** MEMBER OF OUR ORGANIZATION. MORE THAN THAT, HE WAS A **PRODIGAL**.

SO, I WANT TO KNOW **EXACTLY** WHAT HAPPENED.



AND THEN WE'LL SORT OUT WHAT TO DO WITH THE BOTH OF YOU.



Under normal circumstances, if either Genocide or I had killed another operative, it wouldn't be such a big deal.

Nobody would be **thrilled**, necessarily, but there wouldn't be an inquiry. Hell, half the time someone ended up dead, you could almost assume Tao wanted it that way.

But Steeleye's death was different because we had broken chain of command.



And understanding what that means goes back to my original mission...

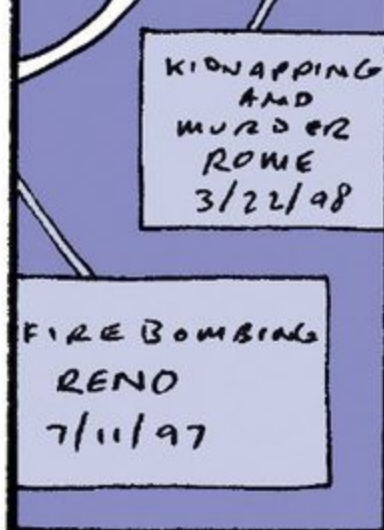
WE KNOW THAT A **POST-HUMAN ORGANIZATION EXISTS**, AND THAT **TAO IS RUNNING IT**...



...WHAT WE DON'T KNOW IS WHAT ITS **PURPOSE IS**, AND HOW IT **OPERATES**.

KIDNAPPING
AND
MURDER
ROWE
3/22/98

FIRE BOMBING
RENO
7/11/97



TO ALL EYES, HIS ACTIVITIES **APPEAR RANDOM**. TOO RANDOM TO REALLY BE SO...

BUT YOU ARE GOING TO **CHANGE ALL THAT**.



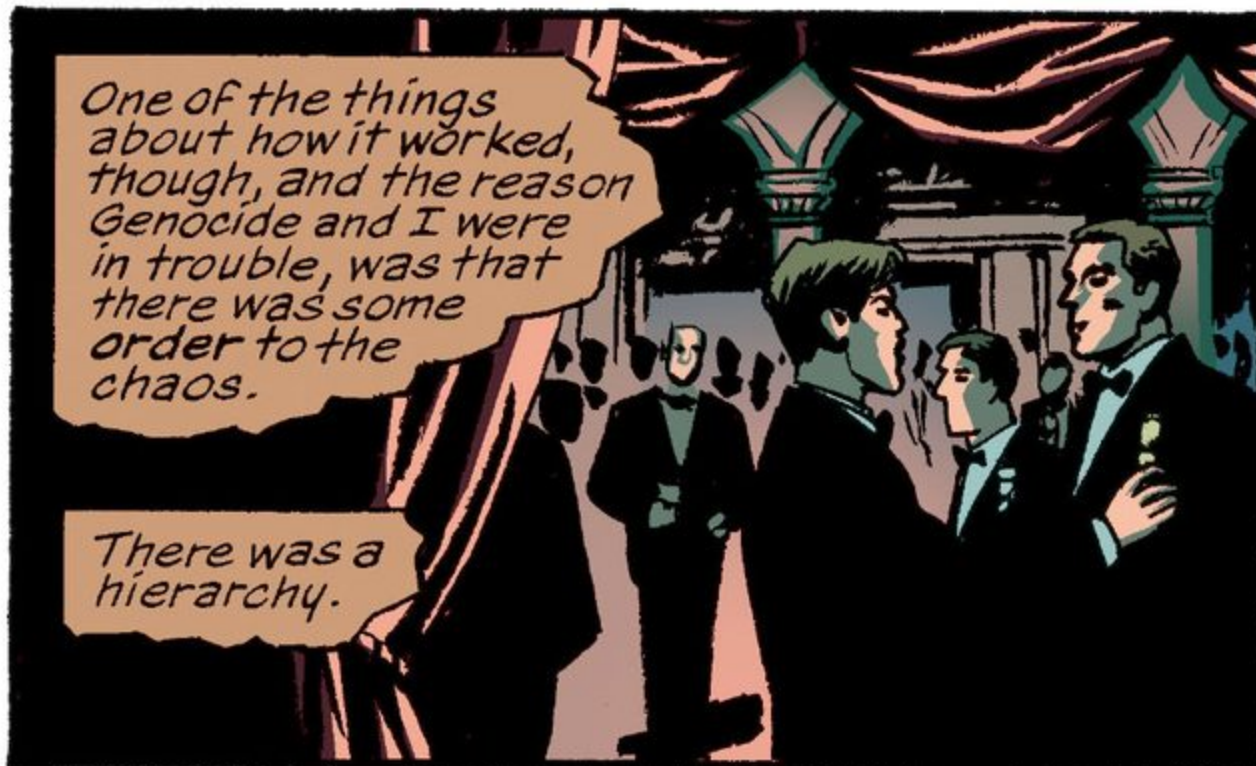
The thing was, after three and a half years of undercover work, moving up the ranks in Tao's organization, while I was getting a decent sense of how things worked...

...I was still in the dark as to why Tao did anything.



One of the things about how it worked, though, and the reason Genocide and I were in trouble, was that there was some **order to the chaos**.

There was a **hierarchy**.



Tao, of course, was at the top of the pyramid, and just under him were the Prodigals-- his three closest agents.

If anyone knew Tao's motives, it was probably them.



Beneath the Prodigals were the Torpedoes. Which is what I was, sort of a lieutenant in the organization. There were maybe 30 of us.

In between missions we did as we pleased, answering only to the four people above us.



Under the Torpedoes were the Blackguards-- our Soldiers. These guys followed orders and kept the peace among the rank and file.

Higher level Blackguards like the ones that caught me and Genocide red-handed, reported directly to Tao.



And below them was everyone else-- the Quislings.

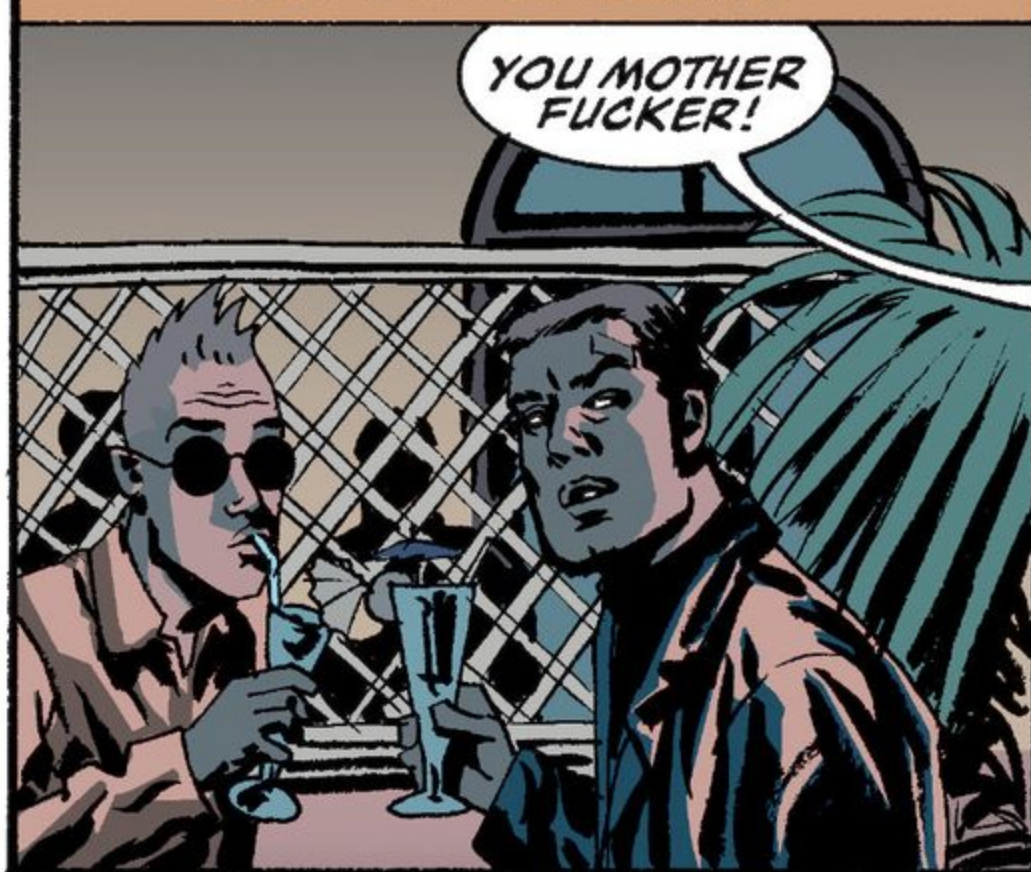
These guys were small-time post human crooks, some working just the odd mission here or there, and some eventually moving up the chain.

And in an organization comprised of people who live on the wrong side of the law, one of the only rules was that you *don't* kill your superiors.

OKAY, THE FIRST THING I CAN REMEMBER ABOUT IT ALL IS JUST HEARING THE SCREAMING FROM UPSTAIRS...



"I WAS HAVING A DRINK WITH TRIPLEXRAY ON THE DAIS, AND I RECOGNIZED GENOCIDE'S VOICE AS THE ONE YELLING."



YOU MOTHER
FUCKER!

"WE RAN UP TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON, BUT THE DOOR WAS BOLTED SHUT FROM THE INSIDE..."



"SO RAY LOOKED THROUGH IT AND TOLD ME WHAT WAS GOING ON."



WHICH
WAS?



LOOK, STEELEYE ALWAYS HATED GENOCIDE, YOU KNOW THAT, SIR... HE'D USE ANY CHANCE HE COULD TO GET IN HIS HEAD. TRY TO *PUSH* HIM...

HE GOT LUCKY THAT NIGHT, GENOCIDE WAS *WASTED*, HIS DEFENSES WERE WEAK...



"...AND STEELEYE FUCKED WITH HIM, BIG TIME."

"HAD HIM LOCKED IN THAT ROOM, WITH A LITTLE KID, AND HE WAS SITTING ACROSS THE WAY, WATCHING AND SPANKING IT."



"THIS WAS GOING TOO FAR, EVEN FOR A PRODIGAL, I HAD TO BREAK IT UP."



"BUT I GUESS MY BREAKING IN LIKE THAT SNAPPED STEELEYE'S CONCENTRATION..."



"AND THE NEXT THING I KNOW, GENOCIDE IS ON HIM, JUST PUMMELING THE SHIT OUT OF HIM..."



"I HAD TO GET RAY TO SHOOT ME SO I COULD GET HIM TO LET UP AT ALL."



BUT SOMETHING MUST'VE GONE *WONKY* WITH STEELEYE'S POWERS AS HE WAS DYING, BECAUSE GENOCIDE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW *WHY* HE'D BEEN HITTING HIM...

DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE HE *WAS*.



IS THAT *RIGHT*,
GENOCIDE? YOU
HAVE *NO* MEMORY
OF THE EVENT?

YES SIR, AND
I'M MISSING A
FAIR BIT OF THE
DAYS *AROUND*
IT, TOO.

THAT BASTARD
SCRAMBLED MY
HEAD PRETTY
GOOD.

MY BLACKGUARDS
TELL ME THEY HAVEN'T
BEEN ABLE TO TRACK
DOWN XXXRAY
ANYWHERE. I WONDER
WHY *THAT* IS?

TO BE FAIR TO RAY, SIR,
HE *IS* A COWARD.

AFTER AN
INCIDENT LIKE THIS,
I'D BE SURPRISED IF
HE SURFACED ANYTIME
IN THE NEXT TEN
YEARS.

UNLESS YOU
ALREADY KILLED
HIM TO KEEP HIS
MOUTH SHUT.

HEY... I
LIKE RAY.

MISS MISERY
DOES HAVE A
POINT, HOLDEN...
WITHOUT XXXRAY,
THERE'S NO ONE
TO BACK UP
YOUR STORY.

THIS REALLY DOES COME AT AN INOPPORTUNE TIME, TOO. STEELEYE WAS GOING TO BE INSTRUMENTAL TO ME IN THE COMING WEEKS...

NOW PLANS WILL HAVE TO BE ALTERED.

I'M SORRY, SIR... BUT I REALLY DO FEEL IT WAS A JUSTIFIED DEATH...

AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, MISTER JONES?

ARE YOU SORRY, TOO?

NOT AT ALL, SIR.

I JUST WISH I COULD REMEMBER KILLING THAT SICK SON OF A BITCH.

YES, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT...

VERY WELL. LEAVE US NOW.

WE'LL INFORM YOU OF OUR DECISIONS LATER TODAY...





YOU THINK HE BOUGHT IT?

HARD TO SAY. PROBABLY NOT... HE'S TAO, REMEMBER?



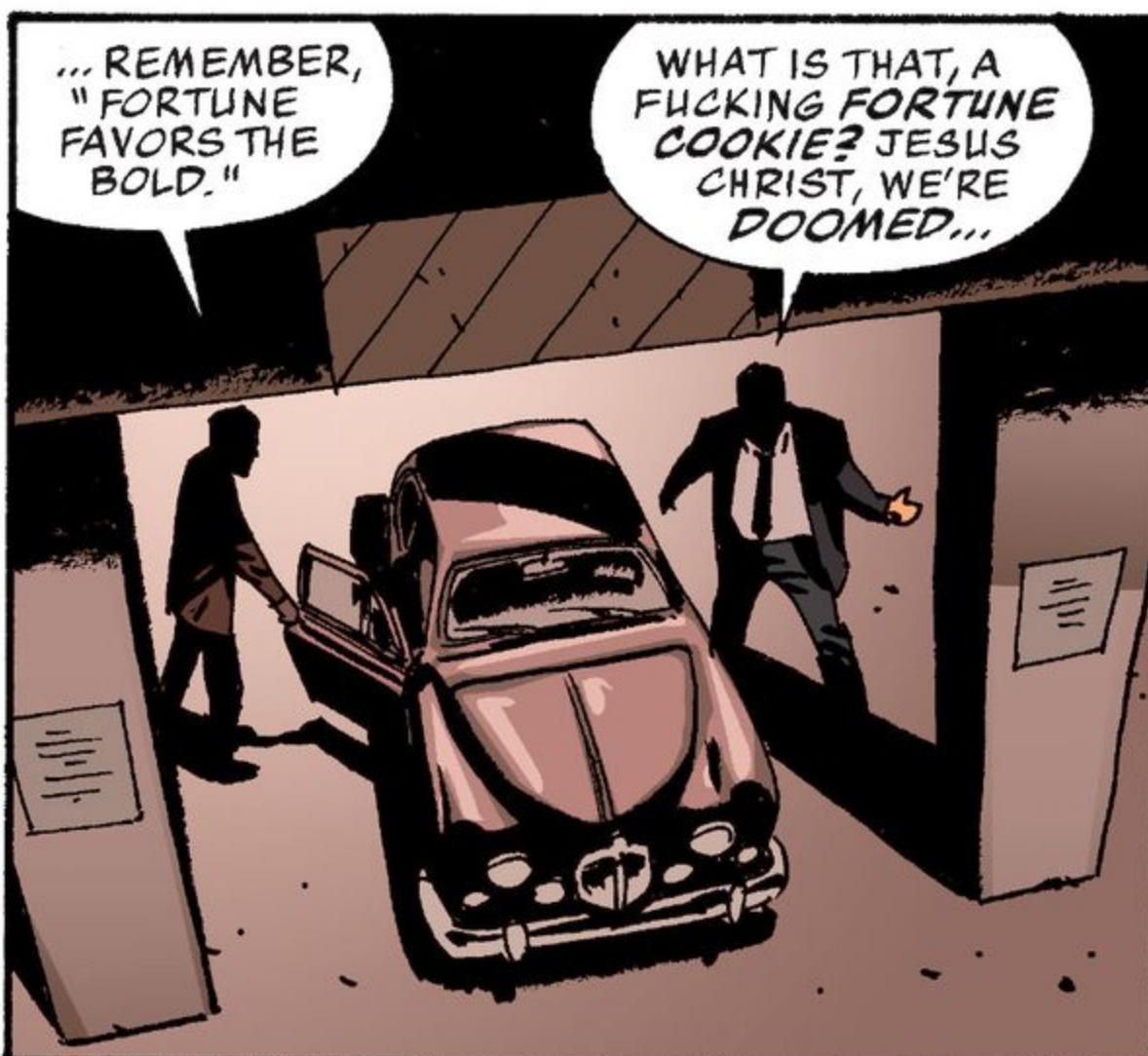
SHIT... DO WE MAKE A RUN FOR IT?



NO, LET'S JUST SEE WHAT HAPPENS...

... REMEMBER, "FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD."

WHAT IS THAT, A FUCKING FORTUNE COOKIE? JESUS CHRIST, WE'RE DOOMED...



THIRD STREET ARMS

And we might be, at that. One didn't usually get away with lying right to Tao and his Prodigals...

But the truth wouldn't have left them much option but to kill us both.



NOT TOO
DEEP...
DON'T HURT
YOURSELF...

Oh... Oh, YEAH...



GOD, I
LOVE THE
WAY THAT
FEELS... THAT
LITTLE TINGLE
OF PAIN...

This is one part
undercover
work, and two
parts desperation,
I know...

But because
of my condition,
the only way I
can feel any-
thing but numb
is when
pleasure and
pain are
mixed.

I still
don't feel
the pain, but
it seems to
cut through
a layer of
sensation,
so I can
feel the
good part.

But this girl,
Jenny, she
feels both...
And that's
what gets
her off.

And this is where
I was when I heard
Genocide yell--

MOTHERFUCKER!



SON OF
A BITCH!

CARVER, YOU
GOTTA DO
SOMETHING!
IT'S
GENOCIDE!

WHAT'S
GOING
ON?



JESUS...



GENOCIDE,
YOU CAN'T--



WUFF!



HERE...
SHOOT
ME.

WHAT?

FUCKING SHOOT
ME... NOW.

BLAM!





MAN... THAT
HURT...



WHAT THE FUCK
HAPPENED?

AW, MAN... GENOCIDE
SAW STEELEYE COME IN
HERE AND HE MADE ME
LOOK THROUGH THE
WALL...

TELL HIM
WHAT HE WAS
DOING...

WHAT WAS
HE DOING?



HIM...



And if Lynch had taught me anything, it's that a good operative could turn any situation to their advantage.

It's exactly what he had done with me...



TO PUT IT BLUNTLY, IT WAS THE AUDACITY OF YOUR LIE THAT MOST IMPRESSED ME, HOLDEN...

I'M SORRY, SIR...?

OH, PLEASE... I KNOW WHAT **REALLY** HAPPENED, AND MORE THAN YOU, I KNOW WHY.



YEAH, I DIDN'T THINK GENOCIDE COULD STAND UP TO YOUR SCRUTINY.



NO, BUT HE **DID** SHOW CONSIDERABLE COURAGE SIMPLY BY STICKING TO THE STORY...



AND THE FACT THAT HE WAS **ABLE** TO KILL STEELEYE AT ALL, ESPECIALLY WITH THE MAN'S **MENTAL DEFENSES**, SHOWS THAT THERE'S STILL **MUCH MORE** ABOUT MISTER JONES WE'VE YET TO LEARN.

SO, YOU'RE NOT... YOU'RE NOT GOING TO KILL HIM?







I KNOW IT SOUNDS INSANE, BUT IT'S TRUE... I'M HELPING PETER GRIMM WITH ALL THE SERIOUS RECRUITING AS OF NOW...

TAO SAID IT'S LIKE PROBATION. SAID SINCE WE TOOK OUT STEELEYE, WE HAD TO PICK UP THE SLACK FROM HIS DUTIES...



SEE? I TOLD YOU WE'D BE OKAY...

AND RIGHT YOU WERE, BROTHER.

SO, WHAT'D YOU GET?



A PROMOTION.

WHAT?



YOU SON OF A BITCH BASTARD. GOD DAMN IT... A PRODIGAL!



Like I said, a good operative turns a bad situation to their advantage... Now I was part of the inner circle.



IF Lynch could see me now, he'd be smiling from ear to ear...

